

Teaching Around The World

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Greetings wonderful New Zealand educators! I say that with sincerity as I now realise what a superb job you all do and how great our system is! Teaching in Georgia, USA has given me a new appreciation of the NZ education system and personnel. The school I am teaching in has around 1300 children from Kindergarten (5 years) to Grade 5 (11 – 12 years). I am teaching a group of 23 third grade children (one of 9 third grade classes). The children are very challenging and come from a diverse range of backgrounds (reflecting the NZ context).

The curriculum and daily implementation of this has been hugely challenging. I teach English, Math, Science and Social Studies. The children go to 'special' teachers each day for 50 minutes of PE, Music, and Art, on a weekly rotation (nothing else is formally

taught here). There are text books for the all subjects and we are strongly recommended to follow these. The testing is huge! Testing is the only form of assessment that is acknowledged and we formally test Math and English every 4.5 weeks. The third grade team then attends a meeting with the Principal and Deputy Principal during which the test results across classes are contrasted and compared, and we were told what to do to address the anomalies. No cognizance of the children's diverse ability is evident, we are all expected to get our children to pass these standardised tests (a pass is above 70%). It is difficult not to teach to the test!

The children arrive at school at 8.00am (I am required to have organised 'morning work' for them to do before school starts at 8.30 – my children play with the reading and math games and are the noisiest class down the hallway!). The last child leaves my room at 4.00pm to catch her bus. I am required to be with the children at all times as they are not allowed to be left



Allison outside her Kiwi classroom in Georgia.



A Christmas workshop afternoon with parents and caregivers.

alone (professional liability is a very real issue). While the children are at 'specials', I am required to attend meetings and professional development. So far, I have been to sessions on; taking running records, teaching a learning focused lesson, assessment and professional learning communities. The children eat lunch in the huge cafeteria with the eight other third grade classes, quite an experience to say the least. It is very noisy and they are required to eat for 10 minutes in silence. The regimentation is quite alarming; the children really don't have to think much for themselves which is reflected in everything they do. They then have a 20 minute recess. We are required to watch the children during the lunch and recess time also. So all in all I have a 20 minute break from the children each day!! This is exhausting and makes developing professional relationships with colleagues difficult. I have learnt to be creative!

Of all the differences, the one I have had most difficulty adjusting to is the actual physical space we work in. My classroom has two small non-opening windows, no external door or ready access to outside. The children store their back packs, (called book bags here), coats etc in the classroom and our classroom is down a hallway with eight others and a children's washroom. Our classroom is the only one in the school with a mat space (most of the teaching is done exposition style with the children at their desks) and a 'Kiwi' classmate (soft toy). We have to have the

fluorescent lights on all day and the only 'official' time I have outside with the children is when I am out at recess with them (we sneak out for a short fitness session during their Music and Art weeks – they love the Kiwidex activities).

Teaching here in this tiny town of Monroe, Georgia has had its share of challenges for sure! The highlights of this adventure so far have been the wonderful people we have met and the travel we have been able to do. So far we have had the opportunity to visit seven states, have a white Christmas in Montreal, New Year in New York and go on a Caribbean cruise during the April Spring Break. It is all worth it and as my mother would say it is 'character building' for sure! We look forward to another year here before we travel home to resume our respective jobs in wonderful little NZ in 2007!

Allison Ayrton